
Mt Wilson Mt Irvine Bushwalking Group

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MOUNT BANKS AND BANKS WALL

TOPIC

OUR AUGUST WALK

**MOUNT BANKS SUMMIT,
BANKS WALL and RETURN
via FIRETRAIL**

Friday 21st August 2020

Thunderstorms and heavy rain lashed the northern face of the mountain as four walkers sought shelter in a cave at the base of the prominence. These four walkers were not part of our group but were an exploratory group who set out two hundred and sixteen years ago to venture further into these parts of the mountains than any other Europeans.

George Caley, a self-taught botanist, and three ticket-of-leave convicts, 'three of the strongest men in the colony, accustomed to live in the woods' had spent twelve days battling their way from North Richmond. On the second day of the expedition Caley set a compass line on Tree Fern Hill (Mt Tomah) which he was determined to follow. Unfortunately this meant the party had to descend into and climb out of many deep valleys and ravines making it a very tough journey. That is reflected in place names he ascribed: Dark Valley, Devils Wilderness, Skeleton Rocks, Gaping Gill, Dismal Dingle.

So, on Thursday 15th November 1804, Caley left his three now rather disgruntled companions sheltering from the elements, and climbed to the summit of the mount, which he



Spring in the Bush

named Mount Banks after his patron and benefactor Sir Joseph Banks.

The following day, with provisions running low, the party headed for home. Caley pleased that he had reached Saddle Hill (Mt Banks) and that he had been able to collect thirty new botanical specimens to be sent to Sir Joseph Banks; the three ticket-of-leave men simply pleased to be heading home.

Leap forward two hundred and sixteen years and fourteen walkers gathered not far from that cave used by Caley's party. We were spared the thunderstorms and heavy rain but very strong winds were blowing; showers looked imminent. We welcomed Corina Douglass, a friend of Merren Dargan, who was joining us for the first time and headed off on the Mt Banks Summit Track. We passed the Caley memorial stone which once held a bronze plaque detailing his journey but of course that was stolen by some low life many years ago.

The track initially climbs through what used to be a corridor of Banksia, Tea-tree, Drumsticks, Conesticks, Mountain Devil and other vegetation but the fire of last summer put paid to that, we now walked past the burnt remnants of heath. Yet, as is the nature of the mountain flora, vibrant coloured new growth sprouts from charred stumps and lignotubers; red, green, crimson, pink and gold emblems of renewed life.

Initially we were protected to some extent from the wind but as we climbed onto the lower flanks of the mountain we were buffeted by strong gusts. From this area we could look down onto the fire trail we would use on our return journey and across to Mounts Charles, Bell and Tomah. Hidden among the ridges in the foreground are the deep ravines and canyons which proved to be impassible obstacles for Caley. The profile of Mount Wilson sat on the skyline in the distance.

Soon we arrived at a point where the track skirted around the eastern side of a rocky outcrop; a perfect place to pause for morning tea protected from the wind. A beautiful rainbow framed the view toward the Upper Grose Gorge from just above this outcrop.

Micheal Ihm distributed slices of his wife Beth's version of Libby's Bushwalker Cake; moist and delicious, many thanks Beth.

Allan and Jeanie, who had only intended accompanying us for a short distance, decided this would be a good point to depart as the weather began to close in, they set off back down the slope to return to their car.

The timber steps along this track must have also been burnt in the fire for they have been beautifully refurbished.

As we climbed higher on the mountain flank we were exposed to stronger wind, forceful enough to blow the proverbial dog off its chain, and intermittent squally showers swept across the landscape. Soon there was a dramatic change to the vegetation as we moved from sandstone country to the richer soils of the basalt cap. We moved out of heath-land into open woodland where the charred tree trunks were sprouting epicormic shoots; the glossy new leaves a kaleidoscope of colour.

We reached the point where there is a track junction; straight ahead leads a short distance to the summit, to the left leads down to the fire trail to Banks Wall. I decided with two others to wait here while the rest of the group carried on to the large basalt cairn on the summit.

My decision to wait here was the result of a brain explosion on my part. I have been to the summit many times and the views have been very limited because of the regrowth since the line of sight trig station has become redundant. Of course I didn't take into consideration the recent fires did I; they have opened up the vistas from the summit as evidenced by a photo Simon sent to me which he took from the vicinity of the cairn.

The photo shows a clear vista of Blackheath Walls stretching to Perrys Lookdown, then across Govett Gorge to the cliff lines stretching from Du Faur Head past Lockley Pylon and Fortress Hill to Carne Wall and Griffith Taylor Wall at the head of Govett Gorge, with the wooded talus slopes leading down to the line of Govetts Creek. A magnificent view indeed; sorry I missed it.

The trig point is known as King George, one thousand and sixty two metres above sea level. This is in deference to the identity crisis suffered by Mount Banks since European settlement. It was initially known as Saddle Hill when viewed from high points on the western fringe of the colony; Caley of course named it Mount Banks in 1804. Hamilton Hume, when he discovered the route across what is now known as The Causeway in 1827, named it Mount King George. Submissions were made in the early 1900s to have the name changed back to Caley's original but it was not until 1966 that it was officially reinstated.

With the rest of the group back from the summit we followed the footpad through lush ground ferns, recovered from the fire, around to the eastern side of the mount where we were protected from the winds; the skies by now were beginning to clear. Soon we were at the old picnic area site where there used to be remnants of a couple of wooden tables; all that remains now are charred stumps of their legs.

The track then emerged onto a formed fire trail, initially somewhat overgrown, which led us down to the fire trail that leads around to Banks Wall. From here there are views across to Mount Hay and the Butterbox. This track meanders through exposed open country yet

dips down a few times into moist little gullies, passes a large termite mound and, unlike me, suddenly arrives at the cliff edge which is Banks Wall.

Shortly after passing the termite mound my knee felt like it had been white-anted so I decided to pause, have lunch and await the group's return. Simon, despite my protestations that he should continue, kindly waited with me.

I was pleased to see that the cloud cover had lifted and the mist had risen from the valley to give the group a clear view of what must be one of the most magnificent panoramas in these mountains. I shall draw on my memory and photographic records of previous visits to describe the commanding vista.

Arriving at the cliff edge at Banks Wall sets off an explosion of the senses; the grandeur of the scene before you is overwhelming.

Straight ahead is the view up Govett Gorge bounded by glorious sandstone cliffs sitting atop the talus slopes. Govetts Leap Brook and Govetts Creek converge at Junction Rock forming a shallow vee in the wooded talus in front of Carne and Griffith Taylor Walls. Govetts Creek then meanders down the base of the gorge past Pulpit Rock, Clarke Head and Docker Head on the right; Fortress Hill, Lockley Pylon and Du Faur Head on the left, to converge with the Grose River at the iconic Blue Gum Forest almost directly below our vantage point. It is a very different perspective looking almost straight down on the Mountain Blue Gums or Round-leaved Gums (*Eucalyptus denei*), the giants of the Blue Gum Forest; especially when viewed through a zoom lens. To see through the rather open canopies to the huge towering straight white trunks holding them aloft is indeed an enthralling aspect.

To the right is the Upper Grose Gorge through which the Grose River wends its way from its source near Mount Victoria. Across this gorge are the sheer cliffs of Blackheath Walls above Little Blue Gum while further west are the cliffs of Burra Korain Ridge and Burra Korain Head and the cliffs below Asgard Head and

Thor Head. On the near side of the gorge the visible cliff line stretches past Walls Lookout, Rigby Hill and Liversidge Hill.

There are so many venues we have visited on walks over the years in evidence from this cliff edge vantage point.

Banks Wall; the cliff directly below the group's lunch spot, is the highest in the mountains. Four members of Sydney Rockclimbers, Owen Llewellyn, David Roots, Russ Kippax and Enn Truupold were the first to make a successful assault on the cliff face in 1952. There is a photo, in Andy Macqueen's fabulous book *Back from the Brink Blue Gum Forest and the Grose Wilderness* (a must read for anyone interested in bushwalking in, or the history of, these mountains), of these four taken after their climb, sitting on the basalt rock cairn on the summit of Mount Banks. (Coincidentally, I briefly crossed paths with Enn Truupold when we both worked at The Electricity Commission of NSW; had no idea then of his rockclimbing prowess.)

Erosion and vegetation destruction caused by abseiling and climbing since that first climb has resulted in the National Parks and Wildlife Service removing all anchorages and the area has been closed to climbers since 1996.

Soon Simon and I could see tiny figures in brightly coloured coats on the fire trail across the gully; the group was returning from their visit to Banks Wall. All expressed their delight with the panoramas they had viewed and that the cloud cover and mist had cleared on cue.

So we set off to follow the fire trail back to the cars at Mount Banks Picnic Area. This route led us around the base of Mount Banks with views to the summit on our left and across to Mount Tomah and beyond on our right. Jagged rock outcrops and small cliff faces and caves on the flanks of the mount were more prominent following the fire. To the right there is usually an abundance of wattles, including the Sweet-scented Wattle (*Acacia suaveolens*) and the Sunshine Wattle (*Acacia terminalis*) but of course the fire made short work of them. Although, as is always the case

following fire and rain in these mountains, the bush is recovering well, unlike my knee.

So it was a slow journey, accompanied by Simon, Ray and Des, but I eventually made it back to the cars where those in the group who did not have other commitments were awaiting my return, many thanks for that.

So ended another day in the bush visiting one of the jewels in the crown of these mountains where we also experienced some of the many moods they can deliver. Strong blustery winds and squally showers clearing to broken cloud and sunshine with a couple of rainbows thrown in; the following day the snow arrived.

John Cardy

Tailpiece: I thought you may like to read some selected passages that Libby wrote in her report of our July 2003 Mount Banks walk.

“Mt Banks has always been a favourite walk for Mt Wilson folk; it was a mountain we frequently climbed as children when it had the rather grand name of Mount King George. ----
---- In those days the fire trail and picnic ground did not exist. We would park our cars not far off the Bells Line of Road, walking down a little track which led to the foot of the mountain. I remember we used to climb through at least one fence, a legacy from when the bullock teams were taken there to graze during the winter when the grass was short on Mount Wilson. -----

---- When we were here as children the Trig Station was in use and the vegetation on top of the mountain was kept cleared away so one had a magnificent 360 degree view of the surrounding mountains and valleys. -----

---- As we sat at this lovely place eating our lunch, we affirmed as we so often do how fortunate we are in this great country of ours, with its beauty and freedom, so many wild and unspoilt places and a good climate to go with it all. -----

---- There was plenty of time for afternoon tea, enjoying a birthday cake (*for Libby*) thoughtfully and kindly provided by Helen Cardy and Rosemary Knott.”

Is it just me or do you also hear Libby's voice?

OUR SEPTEMBER WALK

FRIDAY 18th SEPTEMBER 2020

Historic Road with Valley Views and Chert Quarry

Berghofers Pass at Mt Victoria

The group last visited this venue in April 2009. This is an easy relatively short walk down this 1907 road and return.

Meet at the Lawsons Long Alley trackhead parking area on Mount York Road about 1.3kms from the Great Western Highway at Mt Victoria at 10.00am. Those wishing to car share from Mt Wilson meet at St George's Church for a 9.30am departure

Bring morning tea, lunch and plenty of water.

Contact Helen and John Cardy on 9871 3661 or on mobile 0400 444 966.

FUTURE WALKS (Very Tentative Schedule.)

Fri 16th October – To be advised depending on extensive track closures due to fires and flood

BUSH CARE

Bush Care is held on the second Friday of each month from 9am to Noon. Any help, even for a short time, would be appreciated.

Friday 11th September – Wynne Reserve, next to Church

Friday 9th October – Wynne Reserve, next to Church

Mt Wilson contact Alice Simpson 0414 425 511 or 4756 2110

Council contact Tracy Abbas 0428 777 141